

Field Report

Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument

■ 1.0 Summary

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument appears to have a limited potential for the introduction of Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS). The Monument was newly established in 1996 in a sparsely populated area of south central Utah that is surrounded by other publicly held lands. Comprised of approximately 1.9 million acres, the Monument is a vast, austere, and multihued landscape that is rich in natural and human history. This remote and unspoiled natural area is a valuable resource for scientific study.

Based on the newness of the Monument, there are limited facilities and infrastructure to support visitors. Current plans are to retain the primitive nature of the area for the purposes of scientific study and research. Paved, two-lane roads serve the public areas of the Monument and provide the routes to other area tourist destinations including Bryce Canyon and Capital Reef National Parks and the Grand Canyon. These roads can become congested at times, with a mix of local and sightseeing visitor traffic.

Currently, independent tour operators carry passengers via coach style buses to area tourist destinations. There is an opportunity to expand upon current tour operations and include linkages between the gateway communities and destinations at the Monument.

■ 2.0 Background Information

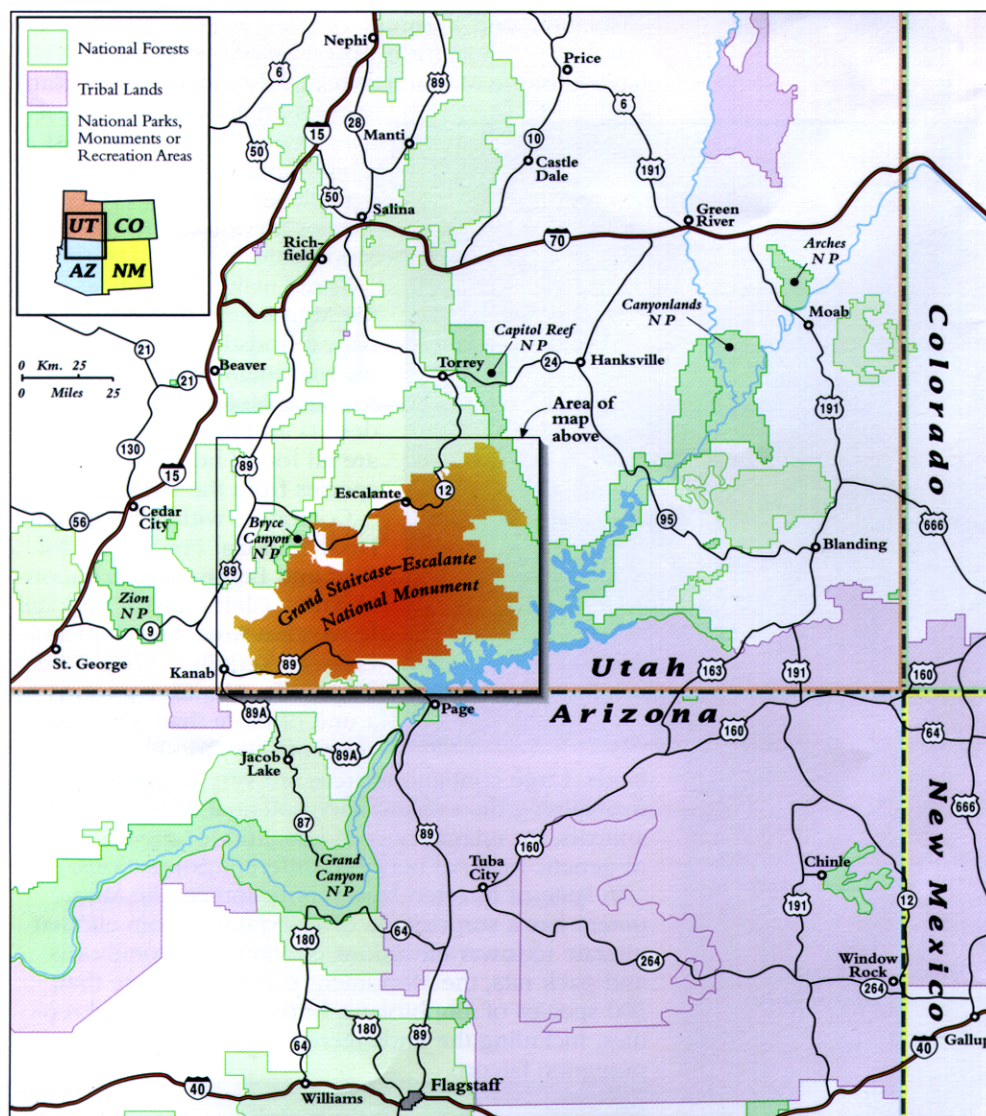
2.1 Location

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is located in south central Utah (see Figure 1). Approximately 68 percent of Monument lands are in Kane County with the remaining 32 percent in Garfield County.

The Monument is approximately 250 miles east of Las Vegas, Nevada, 290 highway miles south of Salt Lake, Utah, and approximately 15 miles east of Kanab, Utah. U.S. Route 89, a paved two-lane road connecting Kanab, Utah and Page, Arizona, provides access from the south and connects the Monument to Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. State Route 12, a paved two-lane road connecting Tropic and Boulder, Utah, traverses the northern portion of the Monument from Henrieville to Torrey, Utah. This route also

connects the Monument to Bryce Canyon National Park to the west and Capital Reef National Park to the east.

Figure 1. Vicinity Map



2.2 Administration and Classification

The Monument was established on September 18, 1996 through a Presidential Proclamation issued under the Antiquities Act of 1906. The proclamation required the Secretary of the Interior to prepare a management plan for the Monument within three years of the proclamation date. The BLM is charged with overall administrative responsibilities for the Monument.

2.3 Physical Description

The Monument is characterized by multicolored cliffs, plateaus, mesas, butte, pinnacles, and canyons, and comprises 1,870,800 acres of federal land and 15,000 acres of privately owned land. Other federal lands surrounding the Monument include the Dixie National Forest on the north, Capital Reef National Park on the east, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area on the east and southeast, Bryce Canyon National Park on the northwest, and other lands administered by the BLM on the south and east. In addition, Anasazi Village, Kodachrome Basin, and Escalante Petrified Forest State Parks adjoins the Monument on the north and Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park is located to the west of the Monument. There are three distinct sections to the Monument: the Grand Staircase, the Kaiparowits Plateau, and the Escalante Canyons.

- **Grand Staircase** – This area is characterized by a series of terraces stepping up in multicolored cliffs. Beginning south to north, these include: the Vermilion Cliffs comprised of red sandstone, the White Cliffs comprised of Jurassic sand dunes solidified into Navajo sandstone, the Gray Cliffs that were once covered by ocean, and the Pink Cliffs comprised of limey siltstone. The Paria River and its tributaries have further shaped these various rock formations.
- **Kaiparowits Plateau** – This area includes 800,000 acres characterized by broad canyons, sheer cliffs, red hills of oxidized rocks contrasting with forested level areas of 1,000-year-old junipers. The Plateau is the Monument's highest part and includes the wildest, most arid, and remote lands. The 42-mile long Straight Cliffs form the eastern edge of this plateau.
- **Escalante Canyons** – The Escalante Canyons include the Aquarius Plateau and 11,000-foot Boulder Mountain to the north and the Navajo sandstone rock canyons formed by the Escalante River and its tributaries to the east.

In addition to State Route 12 and U.S. Route 89, there are five secondary roads and one trail that are open to the public. These secondary roads total approximately 260 miles and are primarily graded dirt and gravel requiring four-wheel drive vehicles for much of their length.

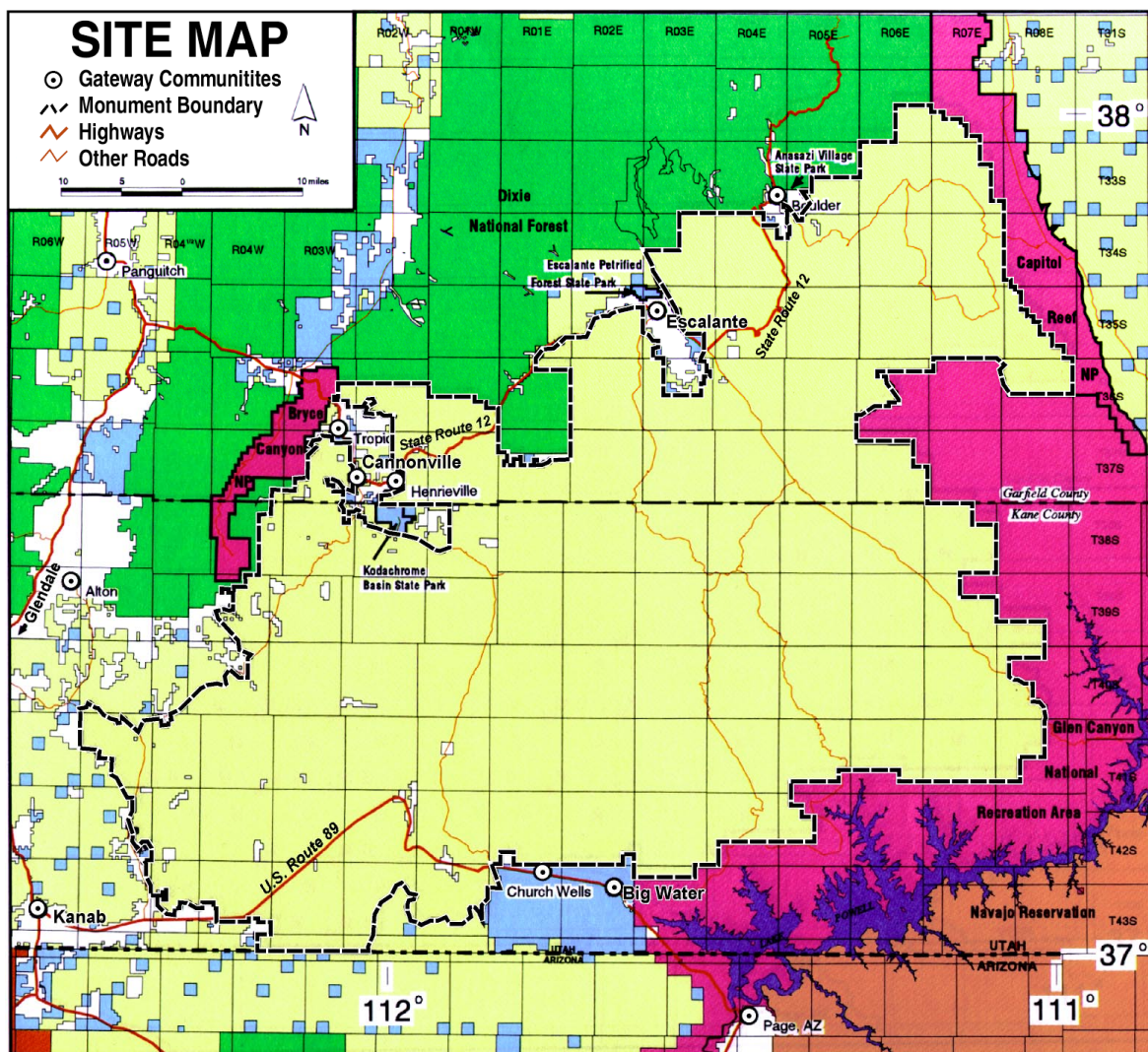
The Escalante Interagency Visitor Center is located in the town of Escalante on State Route 12, and serves as an interagency visitor center and science and education center.

Recreational amenities at the Monument include:

- **Hiking** – Routes for hiking are found throughout the Monument, primarily in the Escalante Canyons and upper Paria drainage areas. The most popular times for hiking are spring (March through May) and fall (September through October).
- **Camping** – Two year-round campgrounds are located at the Monument and include Calf Creek (13 sites next to State Route 12) and Deer Creek (Five sites along the Burr Trail off State Route 12). Campground amenities generally include picnic tables, grills, and toilets.

- **Biking** – Road biking is extremely popular along State Route 12 and U.S. Route 89, both by commercial tour operators and by private individuals. Mountain biking activities generally occur on secondary roads throughout the Monument.
- **Hunting and Fishing** – This activity is permitted in the Monument, but requires a state license.
- **Scenic Drives** – State Route 12 and U.S. Route 89 are scenic drives passing through the northern and southern portions of the Monument, respectively. In addition, the Monument has six secondary roads designated state backways.

Figure 2. Site Map



2.4 Mission and Goals of the National Monument

The Monument was created to protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historic, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resources, and archaeological values. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act directs the BLM to manage the Monument on the basis of multiple use in a manner that will protect the quality of the values identified above.

Figure 3. Overlook View of the Vast Landscape and State Route 12



2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

The Monument is part of a large complex of nearby and adjoining federal and state lands in southern central Utah including two National Parks, two National Recreation Areas, a National Forest, BLM lands, and five Utah State Parks. Visitors to all these sites have been steadily increasing. Based upon information provided by the Utah Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, visitation to Bryce Canyon National Park has tripled and visitation to Capital Reef National Park has doubled.

While the Monument is new compared to these more established parks and not as well known, many visitors traverse the Monument on their travels through southern Utah. Visitation is increasing, despite the fact that the facilities and infrastructure on the Monument are remote and less developed to support visitors.

Visitation to the Monument can generally be grouped into three categories: scenic appreciation, Escalante Interagency Visitor Center visitors, and active recreation activities.

- **Scenic Appreciation** – According to Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) records, in July 1994 there were approximately 1,000 average daily trips (ADT) passing between Henrieville and Boulder, Utah on State Route 12. In addition, U.S. Highway 89 between Kanab and Big Water, Utah had an ADT of approximately 1,900. Although, a portion of these ADTs can be attributed to persons from the gateway communities conducting their daily business, a significant portion of these trips includes visitors traveling between National Parks and recreational areas and enjoying the scenic beauty of the area. The number of visitors traveling the roads has and will increase as visitation at the nearby National Parks and recreational areas increase. The profile of these visitors generally includes retired persons in the spring and fall and families during the summer.
- **Escalante Interagency Visitor Center** – The profile of visitors to this Center generally follows the profile of scenic appreciation visitors discussed in the previous paragraph. According to visitation figures reported in the Monument Management Plan (MMP), there were 26,000 visitors to this Center in 1997 (over a five-fold increase from the 5,000 visitors reported in 1992).
- **Active Recreation** – Recreational activities at the Monument primarily include hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, and mountain biking. According to figures presented in the MMP, in 1997 the number of visitors to Escalante Canyons was 659,500 (a significant increase from 11,600 estimated in 1980); visitors to Kaiparowits Plateau numbered 3,700 (1997 was the first year estimates were recorded), with 42,000 annual visitors to Grand Staircase (nearly double the 1994 estimate of 23,800). Due to the rugged terrain and limited amenities, these visitors generally tend to be younger and in reasonably good shape.

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Due to the immense size and remoteness of the Monument, the facilities and areas of interest are dispersed. It takes several hours to drive from the southern to the northern sections of the Monument.

Between 1996, when the Monument was established, and 1997, visitation to the Monument and Interagency Visitor Center nearly doubled. It is expected that as additional visitor centers are built and the Monument becomes more widely known, visitation to the Monument will increase significantly. In addition, to providing the primary access points to the Monument, State Route 12 and U.S. Route 89 provide the only access to and between a number of Monument gateway communities. Tropic, Cannonville, Henrieville, Escalante, and Boulder are located along State Route 12 and Church Wells and Big Water are located along U.S. Route 89.

As visitation to the Monument and area the NPS/and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) sites increases, traffic on State Route 12 and U.S. Route 89 will increase. Increased visitor traffic

results in more buses and RVs, which are slower and less maneuverable than automobiles. Visitor traffic also includes slower drivers, often viewing the scenery and looking for turnoffs and overlooks. Sightseeing drivers that are unfamiliar with road conditions, mixed with local faster moving drivers, will create safety issues and concerns. At the current time, there are limited formal opportunities to pull off the roadway and travelers often stop along the side of the roadway, creating additional safety issues. Increasing traffic has the potential for diminishing the visitor experience, as well as adversely impacting access (both routine and emergency) to gateway communities.

Figure 4. The Gateway Community of Glendale, Located on U.S. Highway 89, Is the Site for a Planned Visitor Center



3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The Monument is located in two counties, Kane and Garfield, that are among the lowest in population density in the state. According to the Draft Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement, there are relatively few employment opportunities in the area, resulting in the younger population migrating out of the area to seek employment. Unemployment in Garfield County is currently the second highest in the state, while Kane County's unemployment rate is just under the state average.

Tourism is very important to the Counties and the Monument's gateway communities. Tourism currently provides 40 percent of total employment in Kane County and 60 percent in Garfield County. The economic opportunities in the gateway communities are closely linked to visitation to the Monument and the NPS/USFS sites in the area.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

A principal objective for establishing the Monument was to protect scientific and historical resources. The 1996 Proclamation stated the following relative to the Monument's natural and cultural resources:

*“... The monument is a geologic treasure of clearly exposed stratigraphy and structure...
The monument includes world class paleontological sites...”*

Natural Resources – The remoteness and size of the Monument has minimized human contact, contributing to its importance as an outdoor laboratory. The unspoiled nature of the landscape remains a frontier that enhances the Monument's value for scientific study. Relict grasslands and riparian areas are inaccessible to livestock and provide an opportunity to study vegetation undisturbed by grazing. In addition, due to the lack of roads on many portions of the Monument, which can act a conduit for vegetation growth, many areas remain undisturbed by non-native plants. Eleven plant species are found only on the Monument. Three major floras are found on the Monument, making it the richest floristic region in the intermountain west.

The large contiguous area of natural environment at the Monument and the adjacent NPS and USFS sites, create immense wildlife migratory corridors. As a result, the Monument is home to more than 300 species of amphibians, birds, mammals, and reptiles, including the endangered bald eagle and peregrine falcon.

Archaeology – Based on archaeological inventories, the site was used extensively by ancient Native American cultures. A major issue with Native Americans tribes in the area is the need to protect the site location of archaeological resources and associated sensitive information.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Sightseeing along the State Route 12 and U.S. Route 89 scenic drives is the most popular recreational activity at the Monument. Both of these roads offer outstanding scenic views. Generally these roads are not stand-alone destinations, but connect area visitor attractions. State Route 12 is widely recognized as one of the most scenic drives in the United States and runs through or within view of the Monument from Tropic to Boulder, Utah. This is also the primary route connecting Bryce Canyon and Capital Reef National Parks. U.S. Route 89 offers scenic views along the southern portion of the Monument from Kanab to Big Water. This is the primary route connecting Kanab, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, and Page, Arizona and often a route taken by many visitors destined to the Grand Canyon.

The types of active recreational activities generally include hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing. Active recreational activities are generally conducted in small groups and are spread out across the Monument. Bicycling along State Route 12 and U.S. Route 89 is the primary active recreational activity conducted in groups. The narrow width of the roads

in some places and the amount of traffic, including tour buses and RVs, creates safety concerns for bicyclists.

■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 Unit Plans

A MMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement (MMP) was prepared in July 1999, in accordance with the 1996 Presidential Proclamation establishing the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The MMP established the vision and objectives for management of the Monument and its resources. The MMP designated four management zones to manage visitation to the Monument and direct economic opportunities to the adjacent gateway communities. These management zones are summarized below.

- **Frontcountry Zone** – This zone, comprising four percent (78,056 acres) of the Monument, is intended as the focal point of visitation opportunities. Day-use opportunities would be provided close to adjacent communities, State Route 12, and U.S. Route 89. Featured amenities would include primary interpretation sites, overlooks, trails, and associated facilities to feature the Monument’s resources.
- **Passage Zone** – This zone, comprising two percent (38,316 acres), is for secondary travel routes intended as throughways and recreation destinations. The zone would contain rudimentary facilities necessary to protect resources, educate visitors about Monument resources and/or public safety.
- **Outback Zone** – This zone, intended to provide the visitor an undeveloped, primitive, and self-directed experience while accommodating motorized and mechanized access on designated routes, comprises 29 percent (537,662 acres) of the Monument. Facilities would primarily be provided for resource protection only.
- **Primitive Zone** – The majority of the Monument, 65 percent (1,211,386 acres), is intended to provide the visitor an undeveloped, primitive, and self-directed experience without motorized and mechanized access. Facilities would be virtually nonexistent.

Visitor centers are planned for construction in gateway communities, as follows:

- Kanab (located on U.S. Route 89 approximately 15 miles west of the Grand Staircase section);
- Big Water (located on U.S. Route 89 approximately 10 miles southeast of the Monument boundary);
- Glendale (summer-only visitor center located on U.S. Route 89 approximately seven miles west of Glendale Bench Road access to the Grand Staircase section);

- Cannonville (located on U.S. Route 89 adjacent to the northern portion of the Grand Staircase section); and
- Escalante (located on State Route 12 adjacent to the northern portion of the Escalante section). This would replace the existing visitor center in Escalante.

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

The Monument staff has developed close coordination with state representatives, gateway community staff, public agencies from other federal sites in the area and the public. Significant coordination activities are addressed below.

- **UDOT** – Corridor studies are jointly being planned by BLM staff and UDOT for state routes passing through the Monument. These studies will address needs for safety and capacity improvements, as well as scenic pull-out areas and access management.
- **Federal Agencies** – BLM Monument staff coordinate closely with the NPS staff in reference to shared issues and opportunities.
- **Gateway Communities** – The MMP emphasizes the importance of community involvement in planning visitor services. BLM Monument staff coordinate with these communities to establish visitor opportunities throughout the area.

5.0 Assessment of Need

5.1 Magnitude of Need

Opportunities to provide ATS are limited by the large and dispersed nature of the site. The mission of the Monument is not conducive to concentrations of activities at specific locations. Active recreation activities on the Monument are not conducive to ATS and are generally conducted in small groups over dispersed locations and require four wheel drive vehicles for access.

For the scenic tourist visitor, the Monument is generally not a destination by itself, but provides scenic views when traveling between other, more established destinations such as Bryce Canyon and Capital Reef National Parks and the Grand Canyon. The Monument's visitors are generally dispersed throughout the vast expanse and there are not any destinations capable of attracting large numbers of visitors in a concentrated location. Based on current plans, five Visitor Centers will be opened in the future at dispersed locations around the perimeter of the Monument.

Planned corridor studies by UDOT will identify the need for roadway capacity and scenic pull-out improvements along State Route 12 and U.S. Highway 89. The need for bike lanes and associated solutions will also be addressed.

5.2 Feasible Alternatives

Currently, independent scenic tour operators carry passengers via coach style buses to major tourist destinations in the area, such as Bryce Canyon and Capital Reef National Parks. There is an opportunity to expand upon current tour operations and include linkages with the gateway communities and destinations at the Monument. Coordination and joint operation with other nearby NPS/USFS sites would be required.

■ 6.0 Bibliography

Bureau of Land Management Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. *Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Draft Management Plan Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, November 1998.

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<http://www.ut.blm.gov/monument.htm> (visited October 19, 1999).

■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

Kate Cannon, Associate Monument Manager, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

Marietta Eaton, Assistant Manager for Cultural and Earth Sciences, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

Greg Hill, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

Bryce Lloyd, Landscape Architect, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

Wayne Jager, Utah Department of Transportation, Statewide Planning Engineer

Dale Peterson, Utah Department of Transportation, Region 4 Director, Richfield, Utah